

“Consider the Lilies”

When I was a child going to church was a weekly family ritual that had many parts to it. It started on Saturday night just after supper. Supper in those days was at 5 p.m., which was good because there was a lot to do to get ready for church on Sunday. My first job was to set out my clothes for church. Church clothes were like a uniform when we were kids. While my sister could wear any number of dresses, my brother and I wore the same thing ever week. The uniform was a white shirt with a button-down collar, dark pants, dark socks, black shoes, a blazer, and a clip-on bowtie. My mother loved bowties, and I hated them. I felt like we were the only ones who were wearing bowties. The other boys had what I called a long tie. It might still be clip-on, but it was like the ties their dads wore.

My second job was to polish my shoes, my Sunday shoes especially. That was not a big deal because I had only one or two pairs of leather shoes at a time. When I was in the Boy Scouts that meant one pair of nice shoes and one pair of hiking boots for camping trips. When you are growing quickly in your teen years having more pairs of shoes than that was not economical.

Once the shoes were polished, it was bath time. A good weekly scrubbing down was important so that we could be fresh for Sunday. It was not until I got to be a teenager that daily showers became the custom.

Once we were cleaned and dried, we got into our pajamas, but there was still more to do before bedtime. Next on the agenda was reading our Sunday School lesson. Of course, we were supposed to be reading it and studying it during the week, but like most things it would get put off to the last minute. The lessons were usually short and a riff on a Bible story.

Once the Bible lesson was read, we were given our allowance for the week. The allowance started out as twenty-five cents and eventually it crept up to fifty cents. The importance of receiving my allowance on Saturday night was twofold. First, if I did not do all the preparation for church, I did not get an allowance. Second, a portion of my allowance would go into my giving envelope for church. Before I could even think about spending my allowance, I first had to make my gift to God. When my allowance was twenty-five cents I was expected to put a dime in the envelope. When I graduated to fifty cents I was expected to put twenty-five cents in the envelope. When I told this story to some children one of the kids blurted out, “That is half!” She was good at math. She also understood that the traditional proportion of giving to the church is the tithe.

A church preparation routine was part of my life from as far back as I can remember. It was not always this extensive when we were very young, but the hallmarks of it were there. Setting our clothes, baths, and going to church as a family. Even when my mom was ill after my sister was born, my dad took my little brother and I to church. Going to church was special and something to be looked forward to.

Interestingly, there was never an issue that I can remember about giving part of our allowance to the church. It was just what we did. Of course, what we gave made absolutely no difference to the church. In fact, the treasurer probably found it annoying to have to open our pledge envelopes just to retrieve a dime or a quarter each week. Then he would have to tally it as part of our personal pledge to the church just like the more impactful pledges of adults who gave fifty- or hundred-dollar bills as

part of their pledge. Those were the pledges that kept the church going. Those pledges paid for the heat and AC, the electricity, the organist, and the preacher.

But my parents' insistence on teaching us to give a portion of what we had to the church made an enormous difference in our lives. We learned that we are stewards of what we have. That what we have is a gift from God. We give part of it back in gratitude. Even when things were tight, and we did not have much it was still important to give. We learned through real life experience what Jesus was teaching about in today's lesson about the Widow's Mite.

The Widow's Mite is the old name for this story. A mite is something small, like the insects that can flutter around our heads and pester us. The widow in this example truly has little to live on. She comes to the Temple to worship and all around her are people of great wealth giving large sums to the Temple. The implication is that they are showing off how much they are giving. They want everyone to know of their wealth and generosity. The Widow on the other hand is extremely poor. Jesus tells us that the two coins that she puts in the offering are all that she has. Her two coins are meaningless to the Temple treasury, but they are meaningful to her. She has given everything that she has because of her love for and devotion to God.

She knows as Jesus said in the Gospel of Matthew, "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."¹ The widow lived by these words.

Then there is another saying from Jesus, also from the Gospel of Matthew. This teaching also paints a lovely picture.

"Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by worrying can add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. ... indeed, your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today."²

I love these words. In particular, "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these." There is much to be said for worrying less about money and spending more time considering the lilies of the field. There is much to be said for giving in gratitude from the abundance that God has given us, even if our gift seems meager.

The widow knew that life was more than clothes, food, drink, and work. She knew that the most important thing was to seek the Kingdom of God. As she made her way to God's Kingdom she knew "it is a right and good and joyful thing always and everywhere to give thanks to you O Lord." A life of gratitude is a life focused on blessings which are everlasting and cannot be taken away.

¹ Matthew 4:4 KJV

² Matthew 6:25-34 NRSVUE